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Manifestation of the value masculinity in the internal communication of a Dutch and a German police force

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1. Introduction

“Culture is communication, communication is culture”. This early statement made by Edward T. Hall in 1959 puts into words the intertwinement of culture and communication. Culture determines the way a person communicates and the way in which he or she interprets the communicative behavior of other persons (Gudykunst & Lee, 2002: 26, Claes & Gerritsen, 2007: 11). Such differences in communication behavior might lead to communication break downs in intercultural encounters and hinder effective intercultural cooperation (Pinto & Pinto, 1994: 62; Claes & Gerritsen, 2007: 30). In this paper we will present an explorative study on differences in internal communication between the German and Dutch police force.

Today Dutch and German police forces near the Dutch-German border must work together in order to fight cross-border crime. First experiences show the added values of these joint projects in terms of defense against crime (Spapens, 2008: 314). It is plausible, though, that more insight into the differences in communication between the German and the Dutch police forces might improve the inter-cultural cooperation between Dutch and German police officers, and as a consequence lead to an even better defense against crime. In this paper we will restrict ourselves to a study of the internal communication of both police forces. Since internal communication affects the external communicational behavior of organization members (Van Ruler, 2005: 74), knowledge of internal communication in both cultures might help to avoid communication breakdowns in intercultural situations.

We will go first into the differences in culture between the Germans and the Dutch that might lead to differences in internal communication (2). Subsequently we will elucidate our vision of internal communication (3) and formulate our expectations about differences in internal communication between the German and the Dutch police force (4). After a short overview of the methods used (5), we will present our results and our conclusions (6).

2. Differences between the German and the Dutch culture

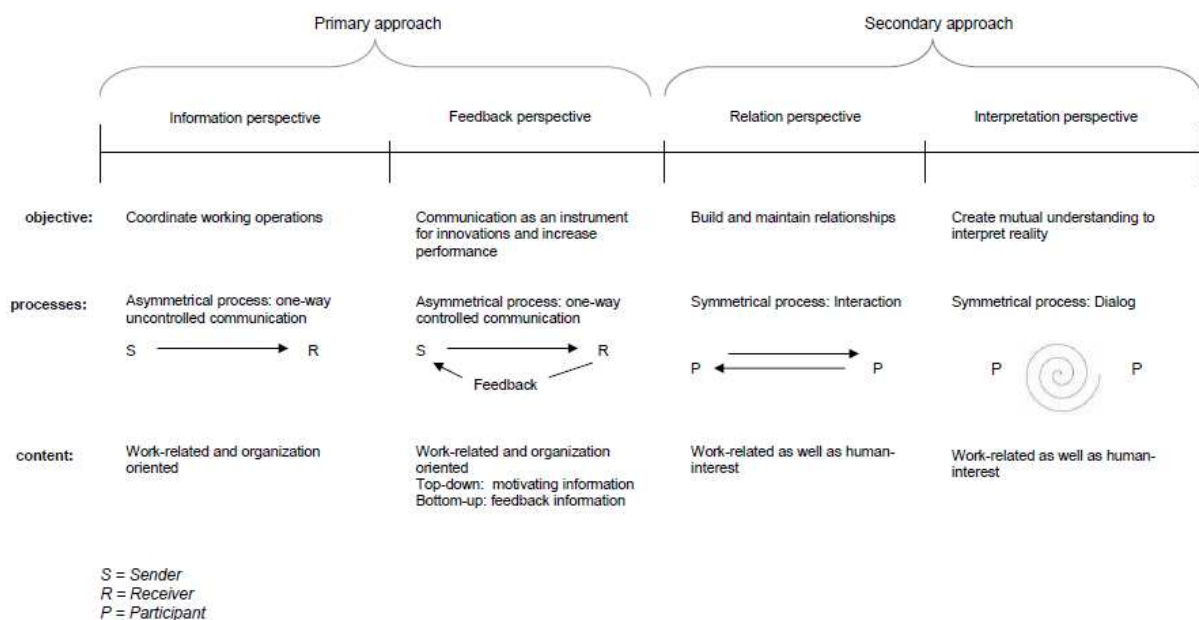
Culture is conceptualized as a cognitive system (Stohl, 2001: 341), since it is learned behavior of members of the group. The cognitive system is addressed “as the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another.” (Hofstede, 2001: 9). The mental programming of the mind determines the thinking, actions and feelings of the members of a group and is transmitted from generation to generation (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2006: 3).

Hofstede (2001: 10-11) divides the concept culture into four categories: symbols, heroes, rituals and values. The core of a culture is formed by the values, which are described as broad tendencies for preferences of certain state of affairs to others (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2006: 9). These values are hardly visible in everyday life. So far 16 cultural values have been defined, and grouped

into six categories (Claes & Gerritsen, 2007: 40/47ff). A literature study of the cultural values of Germany and the Netherlands (Claes & Gerritsen, 2007: 167-168) shows that these cultures have fairly similar cultural values except for the values *masculinity* and *uncertainty avoidance*. The Germans have a higher score than the Dutch for both values on a scale where 0 stand for a low score and 100 for a high score. The difference is 52 for masculinity and 12 for uncertainty avoidance. The difference between Germany and the Netherlands in the value masculinity is taken as the point of departure for our study, because in masculinity we see the largest difference. In highly masculine cultures, advancement, earnings and success are of great importance, whereas in cultures with low masculinity a friendly atmosphere and cooperation are more important.

3. Internal communication

We assume that the difference between the Germans and the Dutch in masculinity could manifest itself in the internal communication of the police forces and that, as a result, the way the internal communication of the Dutch police force is organized and executed is expected to have different characteristics from the German police force. In this paper we define internal communication as a process in and of organizations (Theis, 1994: 13). Based on the work of Jan de Ridder (2005: 88) we address internal communication in two ways: the *primary approach* and the *secondary approach*. For each approach we described two perspectives of internal communication based on the social-scientific views on communication processes, combined with the fragmentation of internal communication in *objectives*, *processes* and *content* (see De Ridder, 2005: 88ff). Figure 1 reflects the model that we have developed.



The first perspective is called the *information perspective* and is based on the source-receiver model of Shannon and Weaver (1949 also Theis, 1994: 23; Van Putte, 1998: 21). The objective of

internal communication is to deliver information from the sender to the receiver to ensure the accomplishment of work-related tasks; internal communication is therefore addressed as an instrument. It is characterized by an asymmetric one-way uncontrolled communication process, because it is not known whether the receiver got the information and how he or she interpreted the information. The content in this perspective encloses work-related information. The information perspective is part of the *primary approach*.

The second perspective is called the *feedback perspective* and adds a feedback loop to the sender-receiver model (Van Ruler, 2004: 8). In this perspective internal communication is an instrument to allow employees to participate in the internal communication by asking for their feedback. Therefore the receiver is re-actively participating in the process; we refer to it as an asymmetrical one-way controlled communication process. The content is still work-related. The feedback perspective is part of the *primary approach*.

The third perspective addresses the receiver as active and emancipated and is related to the interactive model (Gerbner, 1956: 172). In this perspective internal communication is seen as a social process to create a relationship between members of an organization and for that reason it is described as the *relation perspective*. In this perspective the communication process is symmetrical and two-way, because all members can participate and influence the communication process. Next to work-related content, human-interest information is shared. The relation perspective is part of the *secondary approach*.

The fourth and final perspective addresses internal communication from an interpretive-symbolic point of view (Krone, Jablin & Putnam 1987: 27f; Theis, 1994: 45) and is called the *interpretation perspective*. The objective of internal communication is to develop mutual understanding between all participating members of the organization (Rogers & Kincaid, 1981: 63): members of the organization can construct a single shared view of reality (Putnam, 1983: 31, Krone et al. 1987: 27f). In this process all members of the organization can actively take part in the communication process and therefore it reflects a symmetrical two-way communication process. The content is again work-related or consists of human-interest information. The interpretation perspective is part of the *secondary approach*.

Summarizing, the essence of the *primary approach* is that objectives are grounded in the primary organizational objectives; communication processes are asymmetrical, and content is oriented towards improving organization goals. The *secondary approach* is defined by the organization as a social community; the objective is to support the construction and maintenance of the community, the communication processes are symmetrical, and the content is both work-related and human-interest.

It is important to realize that the primary approach of internal communication is the prerequisite to build the foundations of each organization by creating the conditions for the performance of the working operations to produce goods and services (Van Putte, 1998: 139). Therefore transmitting and sharing work-related information is an important task of internal communication (De Moor, 1997:7).

4. Masculinity and internal communication: an expectation

Based on the conceptualization of the two main concepts *culture* and *internal communication* we expect that, due to the higher masculinity of the German culture, the internal communication of a German police force would be characterized by the primary approach exclusively, whereas the internal communication of a Dutch police force would be characterized by both the primary and the secondary approach.

5. Methodology

We tested the expectation by choosing a cross-cultural comparison as the research strategy in which the characteristics of the internal communication of the Dutch and German organization are compared. Therefore the internal communication of a Dutch and a German police force in the Euregio Rhine/Waal, an area alongside the Dutch-German border, were examined. We chose these forces because they will have to cooperate more and more in the near future and for that reason the results of our study could be relevant for them. To choose comparable police forces we first delved into the social-demographic characteristics of cities in that area and found a Dutch and a German city that were similar in terms of numbers of citizens, age patterns, area, crime rate, traffic situation etc. In this way we could ensure the work field and the amount of operational activities of the police forces were very similar. We used a triangulation of methodologies to collect data regarding the characteristics of the internal communication: qualitative interviews, observations, qualitative and quantitative content analysis, and questionnaires.

Our study consisted of three research phases: the exploration phase, the determination phase and the collection phase.

The first phase, *the exploration of the research field*, was to get to know the police forces by examining their organizational chart. In addition we observed the day to day activities of the police officers and interviewed employees of both forces and at different hierarchical levels. We spent March and April 2006 in exploring the organizations and held 29 interviews. In this stage of the research we also measured the masculinity of police officers in both forces with the help of the VSM questionnaire (VSM 94) of Geert Hofstede (1994) in order to ensure that the German police officers indeed scored higher on masculinity than the Dutch police officers. That was indeed the case: The mean masculinity of the German officers was 71 points higher than that of the Dutch officers.

Based on our research interest we focused on the *objectives*, *processes* and *content* in the internal communication (see section 3). In order to collect data regarding the characteristics of these aspects of internal communication we needed to determine the research objects. We did this in the second phase, *the determination phase*. We chose to focus on face-to-face communication moments like meetings or coffee breaks, as well as written communication vehicles like intranet and company magazines to do research about the *processes* and *content* of internal communication. It appeared that none of the two organizations authored strategic documents describing the communication objectives or plans. As an alternative we therefore decided to hold interviews with the managers and communication professionals of both organizations in order to collect data regarding the *objectives* of internal communication. Based on the input collected during the first exploratory phase and from the

literature, we created a list with possible research objects and checked the list during interviews with managers as well as communication professionals of both police forces.

The third phase, *the collection phase*, allowed us to collect the data regarding the characteristics of the internal communication. To gather more insights into the *objectives of internal communication* we held interviews with communication professionals at different levels: the head of the communications department, internal communications consultants and communication employees. In order to collect data regarding the *processes* and *content* in the face-to-face communication, we observed day-to-day work situations and held interviews to check the validity of our observations. For additional material regarding the *processes* and *content* in the written communication media we analyzed the intranet and notice-boards as well as the company magazine for the Dutch police force and the printed information file for the German police force using a qualitative content analysis. In some cases we had to analyze the written communication media on site due to the sensitive information published there. The data gathering took almost half a year, starting in August 2009 until December 2009.

6. Results and Conclusion

Our cross-cultural analysis only partly confirmed the expectation (see 4) that the cultural value masculinity manifests itself in internal communication. In this section we deal in sequence with the results for objectives, processes and content.

6.1 Objectives

When it comes to ideological opinions on internal communication, represented in the *objectives* of internal communication, characteristics of the internal communication of the German police force do indeed exclusively match the primary approach, whereas the *objectives* of the internal communication of the Dutch police force display characteristics of both approaches.

In total we identified four internal communication objectives: internal communication to transfer work-related information (objective number 1), internal communication as an instrument to optimize operational processes (objective number 2), internal communication as an instrument to increase the performances (objective number 3) and internal communication as social behavior (objective number 4). We found an overlap in the first and third description of the objectives for the German and Dutch police force.

The communication professionals of the German organization addressed internal communication only as an instrument to accomplish all kinds of work-related tasks and processes to meet the organization objectives of the police (objective numbers 1, 2 and 3). To do so they used the written internal communication vehicles as a medium to provide all the information police officers need to know in their day-to-day job. In addition managers were expected to have staff appraisals to get feedback from their employees to improve future police operations. Staff appraisals were meant to gather feedback to optimize the working processes and increase the work effort.

The communication professionals of the Dutch organization also described internal communication as an instrument, using communication vehicles and meetings to transmit work-related

information (objective numbers 1 and 3). However, in addition to that, internal communication was also seen as social behavior and it was the job of the communication department to support the social communication between the members of the organization by also presenting human-interest information in the company magazine (objective number 4).

All in all, the characteristics of the objectives of the internal communication of the German police force met the information perspective and feedback perspective of the primary approach; whereas the objectives of the Dutch police force represent characteristics of relation perspective and interpretation perspective of the secondary approach as well. Therefore the expectation for the objectives of internal communication for the Dutch and German police force was realized.

6.2 Processes

The cross-cultural comparison of the *processes* of the internal communication shows diverging results: Contrary to our expectations, the characteristics of the *processes* in the *written media* of the German and Dutch police force both match the primary approach. Again contrary to our expectations, the characteristics of communicational behavior found in the *processes* of internal communication in the *face-to-face communication*, for both police forces match the primary approach as well as the secondary approach.

Written media

In both police forces we analyzed the intranet and notice-boards as well as the company magazine for the Dutch police force and the printed information file for the German police force. In both analyses the processes in the written media are one-way asymmetrical. None of the employees can initiate a communication process by themselves. In both organizations employees are asked to give their feedback to work-related subjects like planning training sections or the strategy of the police force. Contrary to our expectation the Dutch situation was characterized by the primary approach only. Therefore our expectation for the processes in the written media was not tenable.

Face-to-face communication

Contrary to our expectation, the characteristics of communicational behavior found in the *processes* of internal communication in the face-to-face communication, for both police forces match the primary approach as well as the secondary approach. Five communication processes were identified: a one-way controlled communication process (process number 1), a transformation from a one-way controlled process into a symmetrical interaction process (process number 2), a symmetrical interaction process (process number 3), a transformation from a one-way uncontrolled process into a symmetrical dialog process (process number 4) and a symmetrical dialog process (process number 5). Especially the transformations from one process into another process (process numbers 2 & 4) surprised us and made us realize that the approaches mentioned in the theory (see section 3) are not exclusive, and that one communication process can consist of characteristics of different perspectives. For example, a transformation took place when a manager asked for feedback and members of the police force not only gave feedback but also initialized new communication processes by sharing ideas

or their own experiences. Four out of the five processes were identified in the German situation (process numbers 1, 2, 3 and 4); the additional process of the Dutch situation was the symmetrical dialog process (process number 5).

When we compare the *processes* in the Dutch *face-to-face communication* with those in the German *face-to-face communication* a remarkable difference appears. All processes occur in all face-to-face moments in the German police force, but in the Dutch police force the process that is used seems to depend on the communication moment. For example the transformation from a one-way controlled process into a symmetrical interaction process was observed in all moments of the German situation, whereas the transformation of the processes in the Dutch situation only took place in the monthly managers' meeting and team meeting and not in daily lunch breaks or briefings.

All in all, we can conclude that the characteristics of the *processes* of the internal communication in *face-to-face communication* match both the primary and secondary approach for the Dutch and the German situation. For that reason the expectation is not corroborated for the processes of internal communication.

6.3 Content

The cross-cultural analysis of the content of the internal communication shows diverging results again: the characteristics of the *content* in internal *written media* of the German police force do indeed match the primary approach, whereas the *content* of these media of the Dutch police force displays characteristics of both approaches. Contrary to our expectations, the *content* of the internal *face-to-face communication* within the Dutch and German police forces is quite similar in both organizations, and matches both approaches.

Written media

All written communication vehicles in the German situation were used for the transmission of work-related information by sharing work-related information only. In the Dutch situation the intranet and notice boards were used to provide work-related information, the company magazine was used to report human-interest information as well as work-related information presented in a personalized way. The Dutch company magazine therefore was the only written communication vehicle which matches the characteristics of the secondary approach. All other written communication vehicles match the characteristics of the primary approach. All in all, the characteristics of the content in the written communication vehicles of the German police force met the information perspective and feedback perspective of the primary approach exclusively, whereas the content of the written communication vehicles of the Dutch police force represent characteristics of the secondary approach as well. Therefore the expectation for the content in the written communication vehicles is confirmed.

Face-to-face communication

Focusing on the content of the internal communication in the face-to-face communication moments we see scarcely any differences between the Dutch and German situation. In both organizations police officers share work-related information in an objective and subjective way when they report on

operational tasks, and they add personal comments. In addition, members of both organizations discuss opinions regarding politics and sports, and we can add personal information about the members of the organization for the Dutch police force. The content of the face-to-face communication has characteristics of both the primary and the secondary approach in the German police force as well as in the Dutch police force.

All in all, our expectation on the impact of masculinity on the content of the internal communication (see section 4) is not confirmed for the content of the face-to-face communication. This result is in line with the results of the processes of the internal communication in the face-to-face communication (see section 6.2).

Conclusion

In conclusion we can state that the value masculinity does indeed manifest itself in the ideological description, the objectives, of internal communication (see 6.1) and the content of the written communication (see 6.3), but not in the communicative behavior of German and Dutch police officers in face-to-face communication (see 6.2 and 6.3) and the processes of the internal communication vehicles (see 6.2).

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